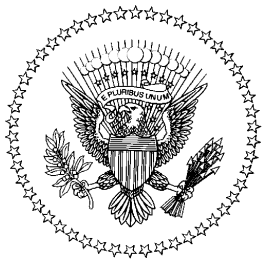
Weekly Compilation of

Presidential Documents



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Editor's Note: The President was in Little Rock, AR, on August 6, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Regional Independent Media in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

July 30, 1999

Postwar Bosnia

[*The discussion began with a Sarajevo journalist thanking the President for his action in Bosnia and his support for democracy. He asked about the leadership of President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and U.S. efforts to help deliver indicted war criminals to the War Crimes Tribunal.*]

The President. Let me answer the second question first because I think it leads us back to the first question. We were the principal supporter of creating this War Crimes Tribunal, and we have made very strong contributions to it, financial contributions. And we have worked hard to cooperate with it. So the answer to that is, we have cooperated strongly.

We also have been a part of an operation in Bosnia that has arrested, I think, about 29 of the 80 people who have been indicted. In the case of Mr. Mladic and Mr. Karadzic, they're not in the American sector. And when the United Nations accepted the mandate of going into Bosnia, the mandate was that they could and would arrest any people who had been indicated by the War Crimes Tribunal if they, in effect, came across them, but they wouldn't start another war to get them. That was basically the mandate. And I think we should continue to do everything we can to arrest people. But I think if—there's no question that the effectiveness, the impact, of both those men has been, in effect, ended or dramatically reduced.

Now, to go back to your first question. You said, is Milosevic the only nationalist politician who's causing problems? I don't think you could go that far, but I believe that basically the misery of Bosnia, the war, the 4-year war, and what happened in Kosovo is because of his 12-year rule and because he had a policy to gain and enhance his power based on selling ''Greater Serbia'' to people, the idea that anybody who wasn't a Serb was an enemy, had no political legitimacy, that their religion was no good, their ethnic background was no good, it was okay to disregard them and uproot them, and maybe okay to kill them.

And here in Bosnia, 250,000 people died, and a quarter of a million people were made refugees. In Kosovo, because we acted more quickly, not so many people died. We know of 10,000, although there are a lot of mass graves that have been dug up, and people have been moved, so we don't know for sure. But 800,000 or more refugees—most of them have gone home in Kosovo, unlike Bosnia, where, because the thing went on longer here, they are taking longer to go back.

So I say, you know, each—the politicians, when they run for office, there are all kinds of shades, you know. There are people who may be nationalists but still prepared to work with people of different ethnic groups, different religious backgrounds. And I think that the difference is that he was willing to have ethnic cleansing and even mass killing to achieve his objectives. And I think that's wrong.

Then you asked me if I thought Bosnia, the people could actually be reconciled. Yes, I believe so, but I think we have to keep giving people something to work for. It's not enough to go around and tell people, after this sort of killing and bitterness, that, ''Now, be nice people,'' you know, ''Just do the right thing.'' You have to give them something positive, some reason to work together.

And what I saw today, with the Bosnian Presidency, was that they were—you know, sure, there's still tensions. There are all these refugee-return issues, for example—big issues out there. But they were much more comfortable together and, obviously, had

more in common than they did 2 years ago. And I think that's a plus.

Montenegro

[*After describing current conditions in Montenegro and noting U.S. support for the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), a Montenegran journalist asked the President if he would support Montenegran independence or work against it.*]

The President. Well, first of all, you have asked a very good set of questions because—but I think I need to back up and say, we very much appreciate the role that Montenegro has played in these last difficult months. It has been in a very hard position. It has been vulnerable to invasion, as you pointed out. And the government of President Djukanovic maintained a position of independence and the position that Montenegro should acquire more and more autonomy and should be a democratic and multiethnic society—that's what we believe.

Now, here's the problem. Obviously, and you've pointed out quite properly that we shouldn't punish Montenegro with withholding aid, reconstruction aid, for example, just because it's part of Yugoslavia. And that's a good example of the dilemma.

Here's what I'm interested in. I want the people of Montenegro to have maximum freedom and maximum self-determination. But I don't think it's a good idea for the United States, or for Western Europe generally, to get in the business of redrawing national borders right now. Who knows what is going to happen in the future? I think—we need to stand for a certain set of principles.

But what I want to say to all the ethnic groups of the Balkans, and all of southeastern Europe, is that we have to build a future in which your safety, your right to freedom of religion, freedom of speech, access to education, access to a job, does not depend upon your living in a nation where everybody inside the nation's borders has the same religion you do and the same ethnic group you do. And in the past, when outside powers have attempted to redraw the lines of the Balkans and impose that, the results have been very painful for the people here. It's led to a lot of suffering.

So I don't want to strip any people of their democratic aspirations, and I don't think it's right for the United States to do that. But I also don't think it's right for us or for any other outside power to come in and, in effect, say, ''Well, because we don't like Mr. Milosevic, we're going to redraw all the national boundaries,'' because the real trick here is to preserve democracy, self-determination, freedom from religious or racial or ethnic persecution in all these countries, without regard to the national borders.

And what we need is—and let me just make one other point. If we had the right sort of economic and political integration in southeastern Europe and then the right ties between southeastern Europe and the rest of Europe—central and Western Europe—then it wouldn't matter so much one way or the other.

That is, if you knew human rights were going to be protected, and if you knew everyone in this region was going to be tied together economically and politically, across national borders, and that the region would be tied to Europe and would have a future with the emerging European institutions, then the actual status—whether you were independent or autonomous, for example—wouldn't be nearly so important.

And what I've been afraid of—the reason I've been reluctant to say anything about territorial borders is, there is a whole history in the 20th century of disaster happening in the Balkans because of outside powers redrawing the national borders. We have to change the nature of national life and the nature of international cooperation, and then I believe, over the next few years, whatever is right about the national borders will settle down. The people will somehow determine that, not outsiders. That's what I think will happen.

Serbia

[*The journalist pointed out that the Serbian infrastructure and economy had collapsed and asked how stability in Serbia could return, as long as Serbia is refused financial aid, and how the President planned to deal*

with strong anti-American sentiments in Serbia. He also asked about past meetings between the President and Mr. Milosevic.]

The President. In Paris.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—in Paris, yes. So I——

The President. And he was, of course, in the United States, at Dayton.

Q. Yes, but you met him in Paris. And I think that you will never meet him again because he is now an indicted war criminal. But I want to ask your personal impression about Mr. Milosevic. How do you keep him in your mind—as a rival, stubborn rival? You hope, now, for almost——

The President. Let me answer you that. You asked, first of all, about aid to Serbia because the Serbs have been hurt very badly by this war. And then you ask about——

Q. The anti-American mood.

The President. ——the anti-American feeling, and then my personal impressions of Mr. Milosevic.

The international community has taken the position that we would support humanitarian assistance to the Serbian people, because we realize that we have very badly damaged Serbia, economically, and stretched the social fabric in this conflict. We would like very much to—the United States, in particular, would like to participate in the rebuilding of Serbia, because we have many Americans of Serbian heritage and because we want to make it clear that we're not anti-Serb; we were against Mr. Milosevic's policies. But we do not believe at this moment we can or should go beyond the humanitarian aid, for the simple reason that if we do, it will strengthen Mr. Milosevic's hold on power. So it's a terrible dilemma. But the people of Serbia need to find some way to change their government.

He has been charged by the War Crimes Tribunal. The evidence is overwhelming. The reason we acted so quickly in the case of Kosovo was because of the horrible experience we had in Bosnia, and I was President for 2 of those years. It was a nightmare, and we only got the international community galvanized to take action after Srebrenica. So I think that, if the people of Serbia want us to be involved beyond humanitarian aid, then there needs to be a change in the government.

Now, in terms of anti-American feeling, I can only say I understand it, even though we didn't act alone and all of our European allies agreed with us. We have the largest military, and we dropped the most bombs. And unfortunately, there were some innocent civilians killed in the bombs, and I feel terrible about it, and I understand it.

But I just would ask the people to consider the position I was in. When I first became President, I tried talking with Mr. Milosevic for 2½ years. And tens of thousands of people died in Bosnia. Here, we knew they had a plan. We knew that the Milosevic government had a plan to systematically uproot the Kosovars, to kill, to loot, to destroy the property records in a very systematic way. And we did not want to wait another year or 2 and let all these people die and all these refugees be created and then not come home.

If you look in Bosnia, here, we're sitting here in Sarajevo, and over a million people have still not come back. In Kosovo, because we moved immediately, 90 percent of the refugees have already gone home.

So if the Serbs are mad at me, I understand that, and I accept it as part of the inevitable consequences of a terrible conflict. But I want them to know they can continue to be mad at me, but the United States does not hate Serbia. We do not have anything against the Serbian people. Our country is a better country because we have so many Serbs in America. And I want to be involved in the reconstruction of Serbia, and I want Serbia to have a leading role in southeastern Europe in the future.

But we have got to put an end to ethnic cleansing. The politics that have driven Mr. Milosevic's government and power for the last 12 years have got to be put aside. The idea of racial or religious superiority has got to go into the dustbin of history.

And I'm very sympathetic with it. It had a big hold on America—you know, the idea that whites were superior to blacks had a big hold on America. We didn't elect a Catholic President until 1960 in the United States. I understand these things. But you can't—we've reached a point now where we can no longer sanction this sort of slaughter. And I think it's a good thing for the world. So the people can be mad at me, but they need

to know Americans have nothing against Serbs. We opposed what Mr. Milosevic did.

And the third question you asked me was about my impressions of Mr. Milosevic. I am reluctant to say much, you know, because at home people are always psychoanalyzing me. You know, they meet President Clinton, "Why was your President President Clinton?"

I think he is a very intelligent man. I think that he can be charming. But I think there are two problems that he has, that have proved fatal. Number one, he has built his political power on the idea of the religious and ethnic superiority of Serbs and their inherent right not only to be a part of but to completely dominate whatever he decides is "Greater Serbia." He thought it was what is generally the Republic Srpska, now, in Bosnia. He took the autonomy away from Kosovo, which it once had. Now you have Hungarians in Vojvodina, and you have the Montenegrans worried, because he basically has created this fear, this paranoia, in the Serbian population, and then he fed it, like a fire, with the bodies and lives of others.

Now, you know, there were other excesses in this region. The others are not pure. But he created this whole thing, and he drove it home in Bosnia, and then he drove it home in Kosovo. And I think he had—in other words, I think he had a dark and terrible idea.

The other thing I observed from watching him is, perhaps because of the tragedies of his own life—he had terrible tragedies, you know, as a child, with his parents and all—I feel very badly about it, but I don't think he feels the way normal people would feel when they make decisions that cost people their lives.

I know, you see, I know when I ordered those airplanes to fly over Serbia, I knew innocent people would die, and I hated it. And the only reason I did it was because I knew I was saving many, many tens of thousands of people's lives, more than would die.

I think to him it doesn't matter. That's the only thing I can conclude. After watching 250,000 people die in Bosnia and seeing these stories of these children raped and these children—they were draft-age boys—killed en masse, and these people wrapped up in a circle and burned alive, and it happens over and over and over again—I can only conclude that he has no—for whatever reason, he doesn't have normal feelings.

So those are my two problems with Mr. Milosevic. I think this idea of ethnic and religious superiority is the biggest threat to civilization in the world today, not just in the Balkans—Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Africa, you just go right down the line, everywhere in the world. In the United States—we had a guy go crazy the other day and kill a bunch of people of different races in the United—did you see it? In two States?

Q. Yes.

The President. Killing these people. Why? Because he belonged to some crazy religious cult that convinced him he had the right to do that.

So that's what I feel. I think it's quite a tragedy because he's an intelligent man, and he can be an engaging man. And I talked to him in Paris, and I thought we had an understanding. I was quite surprised actually in the beginning—he knew after what I did in Bosnia that I would do this. So I don't know how he could have thought I was bluffing him after what we went through in Bosnia, when I said, if you do what you intend to do in Kosovo, this is what I will do. He should have been under no illusion. I think he thought maybe the other Europeans wouldn't stay hitched.

But I made a decision—I agonized through 2 long years of what we went through in Bosnia, and I was not about to let all those people die again. I just was not. I couldn't do it. So, anyway, that's my impression. I think it's quite a tragedy really, because he has a lot of ability.

Q. Thank you.

Bosnia After the Dayton Accords

Q. Mr. President, we talk about—what are the basis for the optimism regarding peace Stability Pact for the Balkans if we know how little politicians from the former Yugoslavia work on the implementation of the Dayton peace agreement?

The President. I would make two points. First of all, I think both here and perhaps in Europe and the United States, we tend to underestimate how much progress has been made in Bosnia since Dayton. That is,